

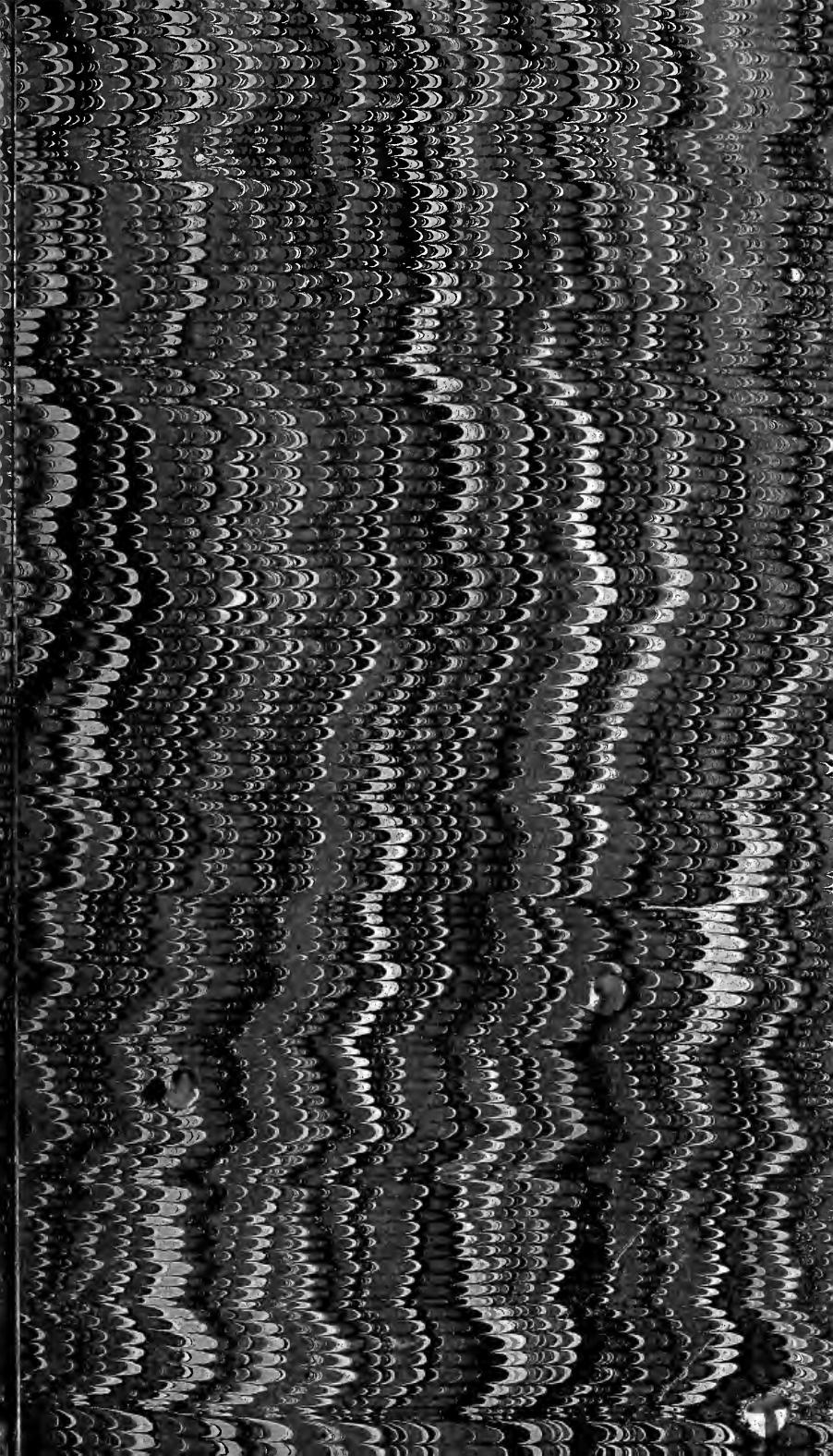
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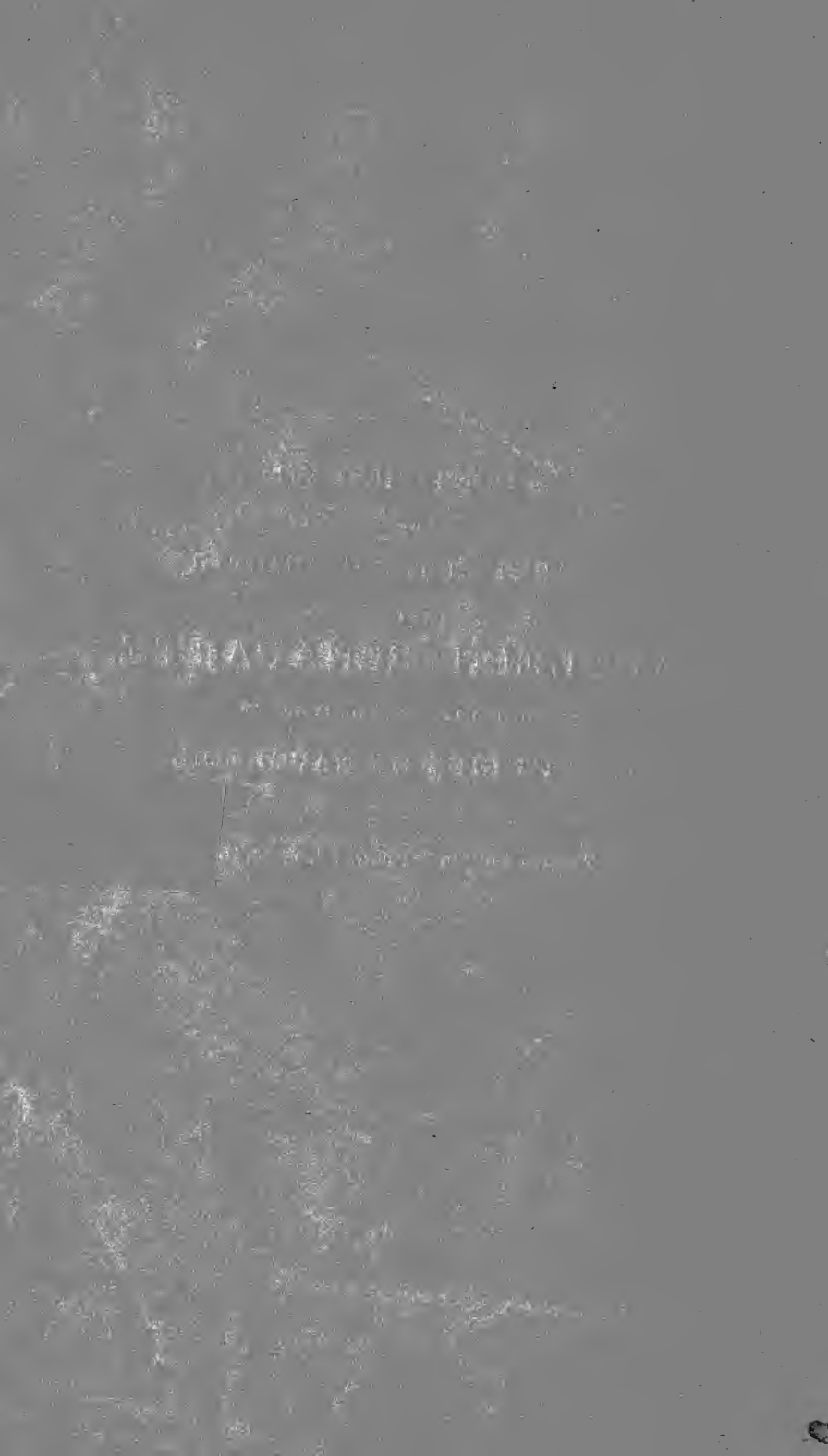






A CONTINUATION
OF
REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER
OF
NAPOLEON BONAPARTE,
OCCASIONED BY THE PUBLICATION OF
SCOTT'S LIFE OF NAPOLEON.

From the Christian Examiner, Vol. V. No. II.



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FROM THE CHRISTIAN EXAMINER,
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NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

IN a former number of our work,* we reviewed the life and character of Napoleon Bonaparte. We resume the subject, not for the purpose of speaking more largely of the individual, but that we may consider more distinctly the *principle of action* which governed him, and of which he was a remarkable manifestation.

The passion for power was Bonaparte's ruling principle. Power was his idol. He worshipped no other. To gain supremacy and unlimited sway, to subject men to his will, was his chief, settled, unrelenting purpose. This passion drew and converted into itself the whole energy of his nature. The love of power, that common principle, explains, in a great degree, his character and life. His crimes did not spring from any passion or impulse peculiar to himself. With all his contempt of the human race, he still belonged to it. It is true both of the brightest virtues and the blackest vices, though they seem to set apart their possessors from the rest of mankind, that the seeds of them are sown in every human breast. The man, who attracts and awes us by his intellectual and moral grandeur, is only an example and anticipation of the improvements, for which every mind was endowed with reason and conscience; and the worst man has become such by the perversion and excess of desires and appetites which he shares with his whole race. Napoleon had no element of character which others do not possess. It was his misery and guilt that he was usurped and absorbed by one pas-

* Vol. IV. No. V. p. 382.

sion ; that his whole mind shot up into one growth ; that his singular strength of thought and will, which, if consecrated to virtue, would have enrolled him among the benefactors of mankind, was enslaved by one lust. He is not to be gazed on as a prodigy. He was a manifestation of our own nature. He teaches on a large scale what thousands teach on a narrow one. He shows us the greatness of the ruin, which is wrought when the order of the mind is subverted, conscience dethroned, and a strong passion left without restraint to turn every inward and outward resource to the accomplishment of a selfish purpose.

The influence of the *love of power* on human affairs is so constant, unbounded, and tremendous, that we think this principle of our nature worthy of distinct consideration, and shall devote to it a few pages, as a fit sequel to our notice of Bonaparte.

The passion for power is one of the most universal, nor is it to be regarded as a crime in all its forms. Sweeping censures on a natural sentiment cast blame on the Creator. This principle shows itself in the very dawn of our existence. The child never exults and rejoices more, than when it becomes conscious of power by overcoming difficulties, or compassing new ends. All our desires and appetites lend aid and energy to this passion, for all find increase of gratification, in proportion to our increase of power. We ought to add, that this principle is fed from nobler sources. Power is a chief element of all the commanding qualities of our nature. It enters into all the higher virtues ; such as magnanimity, fortitude, constancy. It enters into intellectual eminence. It is power of thought and utterance which immortalizes the products of genius. Is it strange that an attribute, through which all our passions reach their objects, and which characterises whatever is great or admirable in man, should awaken intense desire, and be sought as one of the chief goods of life ?

The love of power, we have said, is not in all its forms a crime. There are indeed various kinds of power, which it is our duty to covet, accumulate, and hold fast. First, there is *inward* power, the most precious of all possessions ; power over ourselves ; power to withstand trial, to bear suffering, to front danger ; power over pleasure and pain ; power to follow our convictions, however resisted by menace or scorn ; the power of calm reliance in seasons of darkness and storms. Again, there

is a power over *outward* things ; the power by which the mind triumphs over matter, presses into its service the subtlest and strongest elements, makes the winds, fire, and steam its ministers, rears the city, opens a path through the ocean, and makes the wilderness blossom as the rose. These forms of power, especially the first, are glorious distinctions of our race, nor can we prize them too highly.

There is another power, which is our principal concern in the present discussion. We mean power over our fellow creatures. It is this which ambition chiefly covets, and which has instigated to more crime, and spread more misery than any other cause. We are not however to condemn even this universally. There is a truly noble sway of man over man ; one, which it is our honor to seek and exert ; which is earned by well doing ; which is a chief recompense of virtue. We refer to the quickening influence of a good and great mind over other minds, by which it brings them into sympathy with itself. Far from condemning this, we are anxious to hold it forth as the purest glory which virtuous ambition can propose. The power of awakening, enlightening, elevating our fellow creatures, may, with peculiar fitness, be called divine ; for there is no agency of God so beneficent and sublime, as that which he exerts on rational natures, and by which he assimilates them to himself. This quickening power over other minds is the surest test of greatness. We admire indeed the energy, which subdues the material creation, or develops the physical resources of a state. But it is a nobler might which calls forth the intellectual and moral resources of a people, which communicates new impulses to society, throws into circulation new and stirring thoughts, gives the mind a new consciousness of its faculties, and rouses and fortifies the will to an unconquerable purpose of well doing. This spiritual power is worth all other. To improve man's outward condition is a secondary agency, and is chiefly important as it gives the means of inward growth. The most glorious minister of God on earth, is he who speaks with a life giving energy to other minds, breathing into them the love of truth and virtue, strengthening them to suffer in a good cause, and lifting them above the senses and the world.

We know not a more exhilarating thought, than that this power is given to men ; that we can not only change the face of the outward world, and by virtuous discipline improve ourselves, but

that we may become springs of life and light to our fellow beings. We are thus admitted to a fellowship with Jesus Christ, whose highest end was, that he might act with a new and celestial energy on the human mind. We rejoice to think, that he did not come to monopolize this divine sway, to enjoy a solitary grandeur, but to receive others, even all who should obey his religion, into the partnership of this honor and happiness. Every Christian, in proportion to his progress, acquires a measure of this divine agency. In the humblest conditions, a power goes forth from a devout and disinterested spirit, calling forth silently moral and religious sentiment, perhaps in a child, or some other friend, and teaching, without the aid of words, the loveliness and peace of sincere and single hearted virtue. In the more enlightened classes, individuals now and then rise up, who, through a singular force and elevation of soul, obtain a sway over men's minds to which no limit can be prescribed. They speak with a voice which is heard by distant nations, and which goes down to future ages. Their names are repeated with veneration by millions, and millions read in their lives and writings a quickening testimony to the greatness of the mind, to its moral strength, to the reality of disinterested virtue. These are the true sovereigns of the earth. They share in the royalty of Jesus Christ. They have a greatness which will be more and more felt. The time is coming, its signs are visible, when this long mistaken attribute of greatness, will be seen to belong eminently, if not exclusively, to those, who, by their characters, deeds, sufferings, writings, leave imperishable and ennobling traces of themselves on the human mind. Among these legitimate sovereigns of the world, will be ranked the philosopher, who penetrates the secrets of the universe, and opens new fields to the intellect; who spreads enlarged and liberal habits of thought, and who helps men to understand, that an ever growing knowledge is the patrimony destined for them by the 'Father of their Spirits.' Among them will be ranked the statesman, who, escaping a vulgar policy, rises to the discovery of the true interest of a state; who understands that a nation's mind is more valuable than its soil; who inspires a people's enterprise, without making them the slaves of wealth; who looks for his glory to posterity, and is mainly anxious to originate or give stability to institutions by which society may be carried forward. Among these will be ranked, perhaps on the highest

throne, the moral and religious Reformer, who truly merits that name ; who rises above the spirit of his times ; who is moved by a holy impulse to assail vicious establishments, sustained by fierce passions and inveterate prejudices ; who rescues great truths from the corruptions of ages ; who, joining calm and deep thought to profound feeling, secures to religion at once enlightened and earnest conviction ; who unfolds to men higher forms of virtue than they have yet attained or conceived ; who gives brighter and more thrilling views of the perfection for which they were framed, and inspires a victorious faith in the perpetual progress of our nature.

There is one characteristic of this power which belongs to truly great minds, particularly deserving notice. Far from enslaving, it makes more and more free, those on whom it is exercised ; and in this respect it differs wholly from the vulgar sway which ambition thirsts for. It awakens a kindred power in others, calls their faculties into new life, and particularly strengthens them to follow their own deliberate convictions of truth and duty. It breathes conscious energy, selfrespect, moral independence, and a scorn of every foreign yoke.

There is another power over men, very different from this ; a power, not to quicken and elevate, but to crush and subdue ; a power which robs men of the free use of their nature, takes them out of their own hands, and compels them to bend to another's will. This is the sway which men grasp at most eagerly, and which it is our great purpose to expose. To reign, to give laws, to clothe their own wills with omnipotence, to annihilate all other wills, to spoil the individual of that selfdirection which is his most precious right ; this has ever been deemed by multitudes the highest prize for competition and conflict. The most envied men are those, who have succeeded in prostrating multitudes, in subjecting whole communities, to their single will. It is the love of this power, in all its forms, which we are anxious to hold up to reprobation. If any crime should be placed by society beyond pardon, it is this.

This power has been exerted most conspicuously and perniciously by two classes of men ; the priest or minister of religion, and the civil ruler. Both rely on the same instruments ; that is, pain or terror ; the first calling to his aid the fires and torments of the future world, and practising on the natural dread of invisible powers, and the latter availing himself of chains,

dungeons, and gibbets in the present life. Through these terrible applications, man has in all ages and in almost every country been made, in a greater or less degree, a slave and machine; been shackled in all his faculties, and degraded into a tool of others' wills and passions. The influence of almost every political and religious institution has been to make man abject in mind, fearful, servile, a mechanical repeater of opinions which he dares not try, and a contributor of his toil, sweat, and blood to governments which never dreamed of the general weal as their only legitimate end. On the immense majority of men, thus wronged and enslaved, the consciousness of their own nature has not yet dawned; and the doctrine, that each has a mind, worth more than the material world, and framed to grow forever by a selfforming, selfdirecting energy, is still a secret, a mystery, notwithstanding the clear annunciation of it, ages ago, by Jesus Christ. We know not a stronger proof of the intenseness and nefariousness of the love of power, than the fact of its having virtually abrogated Christianity, and even turned into an engine of dominion, a revelation which breathes throughout the spirit of freedom, proclaims the essential equality of the human race, and directs its most solemn denunciations against the passion for rule and empire.

That this power, which consists in force and compulsion, in the imposition on the many of the will and judgment of one or a few, is of a low order, when compared with the quickening influence over others, of which we have before spoken, we need not stop to prove. But the remark is less obvious, though not less true, that it is not only inferior in kind, but in amount or degree. This may not be so easily acknowledged. He, whose will is passively obeyed by a nation, or whose creed implicitly adopted by a spreading sect, may not easily believe, that his power is exceeded, not only in kind or quality, but in extent, by him who wields only the silent, subtle influence of moral and intellectual gifts. But the superiority of moral to arbitrary sway in this particular, is proved by its effects. Moral power is creative; arbitrary power wastes away the spirit and force of those on whom it is exerted. And is it not a mightier work to create than to destroy? A higher energy is required to quicken than to crush; to elevate than to depress; to warm and expand than to chill and contract. Any hand, even the weakest, may take away life. Another agency is required to kindle or

tory to trace. She was bowing before kings and warriors. She had volumes for the plots and quarrels of Leicester and Essex in the reign of Elizabeth, but not a page for Shakspeare ; and if Bacon had not filled an office, she would hardly have recorded his name, in her anxiety to preserve the deeds and sayings of that Solomon of his age, James the First.

We have spoken of the supreme importance which is attached to rulers and government, as a prejudice ; and we think, that something may be done towards abating the passion for power, by placing this thought in a clearer light. It seems to us not very difficult to show, that to govern men is not as high a sphere of action as has been commonly supposed, and that those who have obtained this dignity, have usurped a place beyond their due in history and men's minds. We apprehend, indeed, that we are not alone in this opinion ; that a change of sentiment on this subject has commenced and must go on ; that men are learning that there are higher sources of happiness and more important agents in human affairs than political rule. It is one mark of the progress of society, that it brings down the public man and raises the private one. It throws power into the hands of untitled individuals, and spreads it through all orders of the community. It multiplies and distributes freely means of extensive influence, and opens new channels, by which the gifted mind, in whatever rank or condition, may communicate itself far and wide. Through the diffusion of education and printing, a private man may now speak to multitudes, incomparably more numerous, than ancient or modern eloquence ever electrified in the popular assembly or the hall of legislation. By these instruments, truth is asserting her sovereignty over nations, without the help of rank, office, or sword ; and her faithful ministers will become more and more the lawgivers of the world.

We mean not to deny, we steadily affirm, that government is a great good, and essential to human happiness ; but it does its good chiefly by a negative influence, by repressing injustice and crime, by securing property from invasion, and thus removing obstructions to the free exercise of human powers. It confers little positive benefit. Its office is, not to confer happiness, but to give men opportunity to work out happiness for themselves. Government resembles the wall which surrounds our lands ; a needful protection, but rearing no harvests, ripening no fruits. It is the individual who must choose whether the enclo-

sure shall be a paradise or a waste. How little positive good can government confer? It does not till our fields, build our houses, weave the ties which bind us to our families, give disinterestedness to the heart, or energy to the intellect and will. All our great interests are left to ourselves; and governments, when they have interfered with them, have obstructed, much more than advanced them. For example, they have taken religion into their keeping only to disfigure it. So education, in their hands, has generally become a propagator of servile maxims, and an upholder of antiquated errors. In like manner they have paralysed trade by their nursing care, and multiplied poverty by expedients for its relief. Government has almost always been a barrier against which intellect has had to struggle; and society has made its chief progress by the minds of private individuals, who have outstripped their rulers, and gradually shamed them into truth and wisdom.

Virtue and intelligence are the great interests of a community, including all others, and worth all others; and the noblest agency is that by which they are advanced. Now we apprehend, that political power is not the most effectual instrument for their promotion, and accordingly we doubt whether government is the only or highest sphere for superior minds. Virtue, from its very nature, cannot be a product of what may be called the direct operation of government, that is, of legislation. Laws may repress crime. Their office is to erect prisons for violence and fraud. But moral and religious worth, dignity of character, loftiness of sentiment, all that makes man a blessing to himself and society, lies beyond their province. Virtue is of the soul, where laws cannot penetrate. Excellence is something too refined, spiritual, celestial, to be produced by the coarse machinery of government. Human legislation addresses itself to self-love, and works by outward force. Its chief instrument is punishment. It cannot touch the springs of virtuous feelings, of great and good deeds. Accordingly, rulers, with all their imagined omnipotence, do not dream of enjoining by statute, philanthropy, gratitude, devout sentiment, magnanimity, and purity of thought. Virtue is too high a concern for government. It is an inspiration of God, not a creature of law; and the agents whom God chiefly honors in its promotion, are those, who, through experience as well as meditation, have risen to generous conceptions of it, and who show it forth, not in empty eulogies, but in the language of deep conviction, and in lives of purity.

Government then does little to advance the chief interest of human nature by its direct agency ; and what shall we say of its indirect ? Here we wish not to offend ; but we must be allowed to use that plainness of speech which becomes Christians and freemen. We do fear then, that the indirect influence of government is on the whole adverse to virtue ; and in saying this, we do not speak of other countries, or of different political institutions from our own. We do not mean to say, what all around us would echo, that monarchy corrupts a state, that the air of a court reeks with infection, and taints the higher classes with a licentiousness which descends to their inferiors. We speak of government at home ; and we ask wise men to say, whether it ministers most to vice or virtue. We fear, that here, as elsewhere, political power is of corrupting tendency ; and that, generally speaking, public men are not the most effectual teachers of truth, disinterestedness, and incorruptible integrity to the people. An error prevails in relation to political concerns, which necessarily makes civil institutions demoralizing. It is deeply rooted, the growth of ages. We refer to the belief, that public men are absolved in a measure from the everlasting and immutable obligations of morality ; that political power is a prize, which justifies arts and compliances that would be scorned in private life ; that management, intrigue, hollow pretensions, and appeals to base passions, deserve slight rebuke when employed to compass political ends. Accordingly the laws of truth, justice, and philanthropy, have seldom been applied to public as to private concerns. Even those individuals, who have come to frown indignantly on the machinations, the office seeking, and the sacrifices to popularity, which disgrace our internal condition, are disposed to acquiesce in a crooked or ungenerous policy towards foreign nations, by which great advantages may accrue to their own country. Now the great truth on which the cause of virtue rests, is, that rectitude is an eternal, unalterable, and universal law, binding at once heaven and earth, the perfection of God's character, and the harmony and happiness of the rational creation ; and in proportion as political institutions unsettle this great conviction—in proportion as they teach that truth, justice, and philanthropy are local, partial obligations, claiming homage from the weak, but shrinking before the powerful—in proportion as they thus insult the awful and inviolable majesty of the Eternal Law—in the same proportion they undermine the very foundation of a people's virtue.

In regard to the other great interest of the community, its intelligence, government may do much good by a direct influence; that is, by instituting schools or appropriating revenue for the instruction of the poorer classes. Whether it would do wisely in assuming to itself, or in taking from individuals, the provision and care of higher literary institutions, is a question not easily determined. But no one will doubt, that it is a noble function, to assist and develop the intellect in those classes of the community, whose hard condition exposes them to a merely animal existence. Still the agency of government in regard to knowledge is necessarily superficial and narrow. The great sources of intellectual power and progress to a people, are its strong and original thinkers, be they found where they may. Government cannot, and does not, extend the bounds of knowledge; cannot make experiments in the laboratory, explore the laws of animal or vegetable nature, or establish the principles of criticism, morals, and religion. The energy which is to carry forward the intellect of a people, belongs chiefly to private individuals, who devote themselves to lonely thought, who worship truth, who originate the views demanded by their age, who help us to throw off the yoke of established prejudices, who improve on old modes of education or invent better. It is true that great men at the head of affairs, may, and often do, contribute much to the growth of a nation's mind. But it too often happens that their station obstructs rather than aids their usefulness. Their connexion with a party, and the habit of viewing subjects in reference to personal aggrandizement, too often obscure the noblest intellects, and convert into patrons of narrow views and temporary interests, those, who, in other conditions, would have been the lights of their age, and the propagators of everlasting truth.—From these views of the limited influence of government on the most precious interests of society, we learn that political power is not the noblest power, and that, in the progress of intelligence, it will cease to be coveted as the chief and most honorable distinction on earth.

If we pass now to the consideration of that interest, over which government is expected chiefly to watch, and on which it is most competent to act with power, we shall not arrive at a result very different from what we have just expressed. We refer to property, or wealth. That the influence of political institutions on this great concern is important, inestimable, we mean not to

deny. But as we have already suggested, it is chiefly negative. Government enriches a people by removing obstructions to their powers, by defending them from wrong, and thus giving them opportunity to enrich themselves. Government is not the spring of the wealth of nations, but their own sagacity, industry, enterprise, and force of character. To leave a people to themselves, is generally the best service their rulers can render. Time was, when sovereigns fixed prices and wages, regulated industry and expense, and imagined that a nation would starve and perish, if it were not guided and guarded like an infant. But we have learned, that men are their own best guardians, that property is safest under its owner's care, and that generally speaking, even great enterprises can better be accomplished by the voluntary association of individuals, than by the state. Indeed, we are met at every stage of this discussion by the truth, that political power is a weak engine compared with *individual* intelligence, virtue, and effort ; and we are the more anxious to enforce this truth, because, through an extravagant estimate of government, men are apt to expect from it what they must do for themselves, and to throw upon it the blame which belongs to their own feebleness and improvidence. The great hope of society, is individual character. Civilisation and political institutions are themselves sources of not a few evils, which nothing but the intellectual and moral energy of the private citizen can avert or relieve. Such, for example, are the monstrous inequalities of property, the sad contrasts of condition, which disfigure a large city ; which laws create and cannot remove ; which can only be mitigated and diminished by a principle of moral restraint in the poorer classes, and by a wise beneficence in the rich. The great lesson for men to learn, is, that their happiness is in their own hands ; that it is to be wrought out by their own faithfulness to God and conscience ; that no outward institutions can supply the place of inward principle, of moral energy, whilst this can go far to supply the place of almost every outward aid.

Our remarks will show that our estimate of political institutions, is more moderate than the prevalent one, and that we regard the power, for which ambition has woven so many plots and shed so much blood, as destined to occupy a more and more narrow space, among the means of usefulness and distinction. There is, however, one branch of government, which we hold in high veneration, which we account an unspeakable blessing, and

which, for the world, we would not say a word to disparage ; and we are the more disposed to speak of it, because its relative importance seems to us little understood. We refer to the Judiciary, a department worth all others in the state. Whilst politicians expend their zeal on transient interests, which perhaps derive their chief importance from their connexion with a party, it is the province of the Judge to apply those solemn and universal laws of rectitude, on which the security, industry, and prosperity of the individual and the state essentially depend. From his tribunal, as from a sacred oracle, go forth the responses of justice. To us there is nothing in the whole fabric of civil institutions so interesting and imposing, as this authoritative exposition of the everlasting principles of moral legislation. The administration of justice in this country, where the Judge, without a guard, without a soldier, without pomp, decides upon the dearest interests of the citizen, trusting chiefly to the moral sentiment of the community for the execution of his decrees, is the most beautiful and encouraging aspect, under which our government can be viewed. We repeat it, there is nothing in public affairs so venerable as the voice of Justice, speaking through her delegated ministers, reaching and subduing the high as well as the low, setting a defence around the splendid mansion of wealth and the lowly hut of poverty, repressing wrong, vindicating innocence, humbling the oppressor, and publishing the rights of human nature to every human being. We confess, that we often turn with pain and humiliation from the hall of Congress where we see the legislator forgetting the majesty of his function, forgetting his relation to a vast and growing community, and sacrificing to his party or to himself the public weal ; and it comforts us to turn to the court of justice, where the dispenser of the laws, shutting his ear against all solicitations of friendship or interest, dissolving for a time every private tie, forgetting public opinion, and withstanding public feeling, asks only what is RIGHT. To our courts, the resorts and refuge of weakness and innocence, we look with hope and joy. We boast, with a virtuous pride, that no breath of corruption has as yet tainted their pure air. To this department of government, we cannot ascribe too much importance. Over this, we cannot watch too jealously. Every encroachment on its independence we should resent, and repel, as the chief wrong our country can sustain. Wo, wo to the impious hand, which would shake this most sacred and precious column of the social edifice.

In the remarks which we have now submitted to our readers, we have treated of great topics, if not worthily, yet, we trust, with a pure purpose. We have aimed to expose the passion for dominion, the desire of ruling mankind. We have labored to how the superiority of moral power and influence to that sways which has for ages been seized with eager and bloody hands. We have labored to hold up to unmeasured reprobation, him who would establish an empire of brute force over rational beings. We have labored to hold forth, as the enemy of his race, the man who, in any way, would fetter the human mind, and subject other wills to his own. In a word, we have desired to awaken others and ourselves, to a just selfreverence, to the free use and expansion of our highest powers, and especially to that moral force, that energy of holy, virtuous purpose, without which we are slaves amidst the freest institutions. Better gifts than these we cannot supplicate from God ; nor can we consecrate our lives to nobler acquisitions.













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